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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides instruction, for the director of junior high and senior high school plays, in the effective arrangement of characters on stage. Suggested exercises include the construction of still-picture tableaux on stage (using scenes from fairy tales and Chekhov's "The Bear") and the implementation of "blocking" techniques, using notation and chess pieces to visualize the purposeful movement of live actors. Guidelines are specified for evaluation and feedback by instructors and audiences. (KS)

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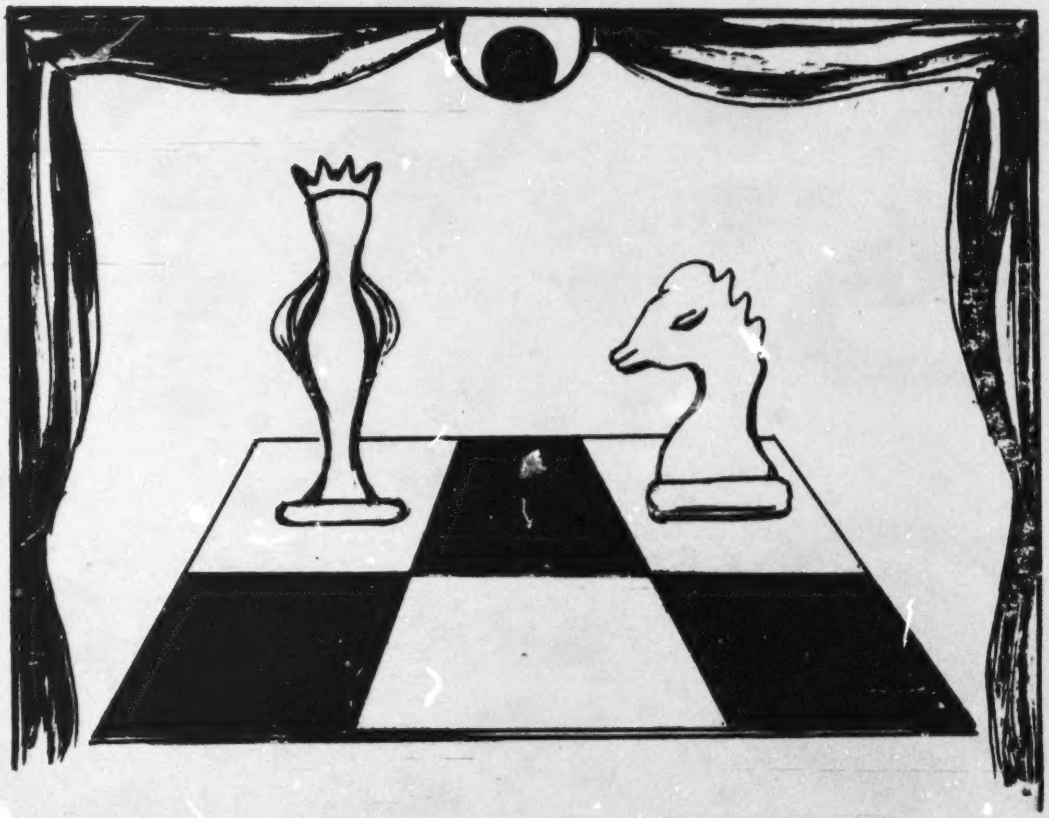
DIRECTING:
ARRANGING CHARACTERS ON A STAGE

TAP * 110



For Theatre Arts Department:

CLAYTON HIGH SCHOOL
Clayton, Missouri 63105

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Written by:
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September 1974

CS 501 496

DIRECTING: ARRANGING CHARACTERS ON A STAGE

INTRODUCTION:

An actor's basic tools are his voice and his body. A director's basic job is to orchestrate the actors' voices and arrange their bodies on stage so they effectively communicate what the director believes are the author's feelings and intentions. The arrangement of characters on stage is probably the most essential skill in the director's craft and the most powerful means he has for contributing to the total effect of a production.

PRE-EVALUATION

1. The purpose of a pre-evaluation is to help the learner discover how much he already knows and how much he needs to learn. If he can complete the pre-evaluation with ease, then perhaps he should try a different learning package. However, the learner should not be discouraged if he finds the pre-evaluation difficult; that merely indicates that the package probably contains information he can profit from.

2. Since this package is an early one in a sequence of DIRECTING packages, if you have had little or no experience in directing, you may wish to forget the pre-evaluation and skip immediately to Lesson One. If you have had some experience directing plays, fill out the information requested in #3 immediately below and make an appointment to see your instructor.

3. A. Name the play or plays you have directed or helped to direct.

_____

_____

B. Recall a scene in which a large number of characters appeared. Describe briefly the central conflict in that scene:_____

_____

_____

C. Draw a ground plan of the setting for that scene and indicate the position of each character at a key moment in the scene (a moment when the conflict was most intense). Indicate with an arrow (e.g. Ⓑ↗= Character B standing in a 3/4 position facing left and upstage) how each character was facing on stage. Be prepared to explain to your instructor your reasons for this arrangement.

4. If you have never directed a play before, but believe you can do the above operations on a given play, try it with Act II, Scene 4 of West Side Story (available in the Drama Resource Area) and make an appointment to see your instructor.

LESSON ONE: TABLEAUX

PURPOSE:

Though one of a director's objectives is to keep the action moving, he may possibly best visualize a scene as a series of carefully composed still pictures which capture the basic tensions and relationships at key moments during the scene. By actually going through the process with actors, of creating still picture tableaux both the director and his players will come to understand what points in the scene are key moments and where they want to focus the audience's attention.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

The learner will be able to represent key moments in the final scene of Chekhov's "The Bear" with five still-life tableaux. He will be able to explain why he chose the five tableaux he did and to point out how a choice of key scenes and the placement of people at those moments affects the way an audience will perceive or understand a particular incident in a play.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. A tableau is a still-life scene depicting a moment in history or fiction represented by real people standing or sitting in frozen positions. You may compare it to a "stop action" shot on television without sound. Representations of the Nativity scenes that appear in front of some churches at Christmas time are a type of tableau. Tableaux is plural for tableau.

2. To complete the activities you will need to recruit classmates as actors. Tell them there is no memorization of lines involved.

3. Do Activities 1, 2, and 3 and then arrange a time and place for a post evaluation.

ACTIVITIES:

1. With the aid of four or more actors dramatize five key moments in any one of the following fairy stories by arranging your characters into five to eight tableaux which, when viewed in sequence, "tell" the story.
   Goldilocks and The Three Bears
   Little Red Riding Hood
   The Three Little Pigs
   Hansel and Gretel
   The Emperor's New Clothes

You may cast one or two actors as different characters in different tableaux, but your main characters should be played by the same actors throughout. You do not need to use all your actors in each scene.

Your actors may assist you in deciding on which five moments to dramatize and you may also consult with them about the placement of characters within a scene.

For later reference, make some notations about what is happening in the story at each of the five moments you end up dramatizing. It may help to make a stick figure sketch of each tableau. If you wish to do so, use the space at the right of your notations.

a. Tableau One:_____

_____

_____

b. Tableau Two:_____

_____

_____

c. Tableau Three:_____

_____

_____

d. Tableau Four:_____

_____

_____

e. Tableau Five:_____

_____

_____

f. Tableau Six:_____

_____

_____

g. Tableau Seven:_____

_____

_____

h. Tableau Eight:_____

_____

_____

To test out the effectiveness of your choices ask a classmate or a personal friend to watch your tableaux in sequence, closing his eyes while actors move between one still picture and the next. Don't tell this person what story you're dramatizing; only that it's a fairy tale. When your actors complete the sequence, ask your viewer if he can identify the story. If he can, and if he can tell you what was happening in each sequence, then you have obviously been clear in your arrangement of characters. If he can't, perhaps you should refine the arrangement of characters in your tableaux and have a second "showing" for another volunteer viewer. Have your volunteer viewer fill in the following blanks:

I watched the five tableaux arranged by _____(your name) and properly identified the story the actors depicted as _____

_____

Signed:_____

Date:_____

2. Locate a copy of Drama, Student Handbook in the Drama Resource Area and read pages 83-87, a scene from Chekhov's "The Bear." Follow the same procedure you did in Activity 1, but this time instead of using a fairy tale and five still pictures, condense the events that take place on pages 83 through 87 to six tableaux.

As before, make some notations below about what is happening in the story at each of the six moments you end up staging as still pictures.

a. Tableau One:_____

_____

b. Tableau Two:_____

_____

c. Tableau Three:_____

_____

d. Tableau Four:_____

_____

e. Tableau Five:_____

_____

f. Tableau Six:_____

_____

Before "performing" your tableaux for an audience, go on to Activity 3.

3. The process of deciding what moments in a story or scene are KEY MOMENTS is an extremely important one. In effect, the director is making some decisions about what the story is all about. And when positioning people in tableaux representing those key moments, the director must decide WHO is the most important person in the scene at that particular moment. The "most important person" may shift from moment to moment, and sometimes two people may be equally important. But when creating a series of tableaux a director may discover that, overall, one character seems more important than another. This discovery, in turn, may lead to a more precise or fully thought out interpretation of a scene.

   The following exercise is designed to help you discover if and how two different sets of tableaux influence a director's apparent interpretation of a scene. Prepare two versions of the scene from "The Bear" in tableaux. Each version is to use only five of the six scenes you planned for in Activity 2. Note below how you plan to vary your two sequences.

   a. In version one my actors will omit Tableau_____.

   b. In version two my actors will omit Tableau_____.

   Discuss with your actors the difference in effect between the two sequences. Is one version clearer than the other? What is "lost" by omitting a tableau in each version? Does the focus of the scene seem to shift from Smirnov to Popova or vice-versa when you omit one tableau and add another? Be prepared to explain what you believe some of the differences are during your post-evaluation.

POST-EVALUATION:

1. Arrange a time and place to present the two tableau sequences you prepared in Activity 3 above to an audience consisting of your instructor and invited classmates or guests.

2. Following your presentation explain to your audience what you believe is the difference in effect between the two sequences. Try to summarize what (if anything) this lesson has taught you about the relationship between the arrangement of characters on stage and a director's interpretation of a scene. Members of your audience may wish to comment on what they observed or learned as well.

LESSON TWO: ADDING MOVEMENT TO TABLEAUX

PURPOSE:

With certain still pictures in mind for key moments in a scene, a director will next want to concentrate on having his characters (actors) move naturally during the time between those key moments so that they are "in position" for the next stage picture. (He will also want to eliminate the "stop action" quality built into the exercises of Lesson One). One possible approach is to work cooperatively with his actors in finding appropriate lines and motivation for movement. Another approach is to work alone.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

With the aid of three actors (or a representation of actors) the learner will demonstrate his ability to add purposeful movement to the scene he represented in Lesson One by way of tableaux.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Complete either Activity 1 or Activity 2 or both.

2. For Activity 1 you will need to recruit the aid of three actors, preferably the ones who helped you complete Activity 3 of Lesson One. For Activity 2 you may wish to check out some chess men from your instructor. Scripts of "The Bear" are available in the Drama Resource Area.

3. If you are lost or unsure of yourself when it comes to providing stage movement, or if you would like to review some basic principles of stage movement, check out and examine copies of TAP 210 and TAP 211.

4. You will note or remember that in TAP 210 and TAP 211 the actor is often provided with a ground plan. Though it is not absolutely necessary, it would be helpful if you would create a ground plan for "The Bear" before beginning Activity 1.

5. When you have completed Activity 1 or 2 to your satisfaction arrange a time with your instructor for your post-evaluation.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Using three actors, recreate the five or six tableaux you created for "The Bear" in Lesson One. Provide your actors with scripts and tell them that they will do a reading of the scene with movement. One of your objectives will be to incorporate the tableaux into the reading of the script and the over-all movement.

   So that you can inform your actors about the precise or approximate moment when each tableau fits into the script make some notations in advance.

Tableau One: Page___ Line ___ Character speaking_____

Tableau Two: Page___ Line ___ Character speaking_____

Tableau Three: Page___ Line___ Character speaking_____

Tableau Four: Page___ Line___ Character speaking_____

Tableau Five: Page___ Line___ Character speaking_____

(Optional) Tableau Six: Page___ Line___ Character speaking_____

Ask your actors to go through a reading of the scene once, moving whenever they feel a line or a stage direction warrants movement. And ask them to keep in mind where they will be standing in the next "tableau." (The word is in quotes because at this point the stage picture will not be frozen but, rather, part of a continuous sequence.)

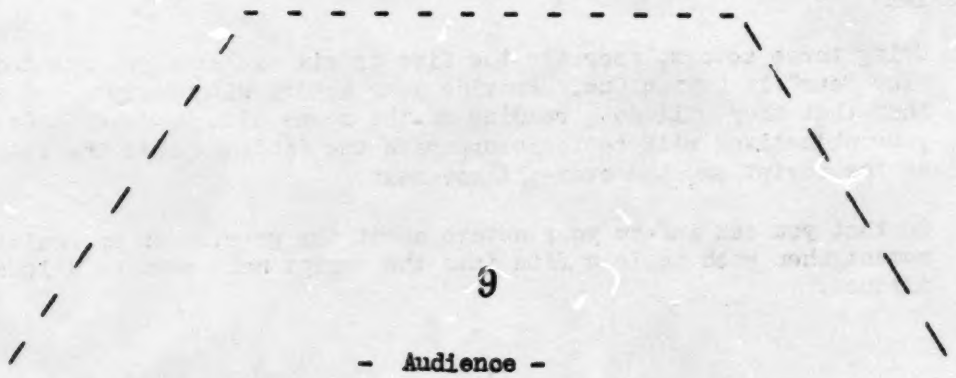
It is not always necessary or desireable for a director to give actors the freedom to move where they want to and when they want to, but that's the process recommended in this activity. As director, however, you should have the power to change or eliminate a move that seems inappropriate to you.

When movement is inadequate to "set up" the next tableau (which comes at a time pre-determined by you by page and line above), stop the actors, backtrack, and see if you can invent action which will lead up to the kind of picture you had in mind when first working with the scene. Repeat this process until you have created your final tableau and completed the scene.

The above is one method of what is called BLOCKING a scene. Another method is described in Activity 2. BLOCKING means figuring out where and when in a scene actors will physically move their bodies by walking, sitting, standing, etc. The director or his assistant usually makes notations in his script (and asks the actors to make them in their scripts) so that he can remember from one rehearsal to the next what movements have been decided upon. The director's annotated script is called a PROMPT SCRIPT. A later package on directing, TAP 112, deals with PROMPT SCRIPTS.

If you did not make a ground plan for the scene from "The Bear" before beginning Activity 1 (see instruction #4), you should probably make one now based on some of the blocking you have already created. Sketch a rough ground plan for the scene below.

GROUND PLAN FOR "THE BEAR"



Rehearse the movement in the scene several more times. This is called "setting the blocking." You will probably want to make minor revisions here and there each time you run through the scene. When you are happy with the blocking, make arrangements with your instructor for a post-evaluation.

If you feel unsatisfied with the blocking you created with this activity, try Activity 2 and <u>then</u> try out your blocking with your volunteer actors.

2. Another approach to blocking is to begin without actors. Create a ground plan for the scene from "The Bear" on a sheet of paper 8" X 10" or larger. The room probably should contain at least one door, french windows leading to a garden, a sofa and/or some chairs, and at least one table. You may wish to include other items like a window, a fireplace, bookcases, a desk, etc. Let each half inch of distance on your ground plan represent one foot distance on the stage.

   Using chess pieces or inverted golf tees to represent Smirnov, Popova, and Luka position all three on the ground plan to suggest where you would position actors on stage at the beginning of the scene.

   Then, as you read through the scene line by line, move your "characters" on the ground plan as you would like to see the actors move on stage. Occasionally you will find you have maneuvered a character into an undesireable position. (For example, just before Popova exits she may be too far from the door to exit gracefully or with adequate force). When that happens, you will have to "backtrack" and figure out some alternate blocking.

   Make notations about your blocking. The easiest method to do this would be to make a photocopy of the script and then write your notations in the margins of your own copy. Another method would be to <u>pencil</u> in numerals on the margins of the script you have borrowed; then on a separate piece of notebook paper write corresponding numbers and the blocking you have planned at that point in the script. Be sure to erase your penciled numerals before returning the borrowed script.

   Using the chess man method of blocking does not prevent you from utilizing the tableaux you created in Lesson One. In fact it may be easier to incorporate the tableaux in this type of blocking than it is when working with actors because you, as director, have total control of all the characters' movements.

   When you are satisfied with your blocking for the entire scene tape record the dialogue (either alone--playing all roles--or with the aid of a friend), and practice moving your chessmen to your "reading" of the scene. Then make arrangements with your instructor for a post-evaluation.

<u>POST-EVALUATION</u>:

1. Your post-evaluation will consist of having your actors or your chess men "walk through" the scene from "The Bear" to demonstrate the blocking you have settled on. Your audience should consist of your instructor and anyone else you would like to invite.

2. Be prepared to explain some of the motivation for specific movements you have blocked into the scene and to explain what use, if any, you made of the tableaux from Lesson One.

3. Bring your copy of this packet (with all necessary blanks filled in) along with you to your post-evaluation briefing with your instructor.

4. Also please fill out the following packet evaluation. You do not have to sign your name to the evaluation form, but, <u>please</u> it's your opinion we're interested in, so make your comments <u>without</u> talking over the questionnaire with others.

EVALUATION OF TAP 110

1. Were the instructions for each activity in this packet clear? ___yes ___no
   If not, please state which ones were confusing:

2. Do you feel the process of creating tableaux is useful to a director?

   ___ yes ___ no

   To an actor? ___ yes ___ no

3. What did you feel was most confusing, frustrating, or annoying about completing these lessons?

   Have you any suggestions for revising the package so as to avoid this problem in the future?

4. Some professional directors say that using tableaux as a preliminary to blocking is a confusing process and certainly not advisable for beginning directors. Would you agree?

   ___ yes ___ no

5. How would you rate this package (circle one)?

No Good	Some Good	OK	Good	Very Good

(Optional) Signed:_____